



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



Rewarding Learning

GCE AS and A level subject criteria for geography

September 2006

QCA/06/2852

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Aims	3
3. Subject content	4
4. Key skills	5
5. Assessment objectives	5
6. Scheme of assessment	6

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The subject criteria for advanced subsidiary (AS) and advanced (A) level set out the subject-specific essentials that should be common to all geography AS and A level specifications. They provide the framework of knowledge, understanding and skills from which the awarding body creates the detail of the specification.

Subject criteria are intended to:

- help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
- define the relationship between the AS and A level specifications, with the AS level as a subset of the A level
- ensure that the rigour of A level is maintained
- help higher education institutions and employers know what has been studied and assessed.

Any GCE specification that contains significant elements of the subject geography must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

Specifications will need to make clear how AS and A2 in geography are distinctive, with clear aims and rationale for each part of the A level, together with a statement about how distinctiveness and progression has been addressed from GCSE and between AS and A2, and how AS and A2 as a whole produce a coherent approach to the understanding of geography.

2. Aims

- 2.1 AS and A level specifications in geography should encourage students to:
- develop and apply their understanding of geographical concepts and processes to understand and interpret our changing world
 - develop their awareness of the complexity of interactions within and between societies, economies, cultures and environments at scales from local to global
 - develop as global citizens who recognise the challenges of sustainability and the implications for their own and others' lives
 - improve as critical and reflective learners aware of the importance of attitudes and values, including their own

- become adept in the use and application of skills and new technologies through their geographical studies both in and outside the classroom
- be inspired by the world around them, and gain enjoyment and satisfaction from their geographical studies and understand their relevance

3. Subject content

The relationship between AS and A level

AS and A level specifications in geography should be of sufficient depth and breadth to allow students to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills specified below. They must include a rationale for the selection of content indicating how progression from GCSE and between AS and A2 has been addressed. Specifications should reflect new ideas and developments about the changing nature of geography in the 21st century and its relevance for everyday life.

3.1 AS and A level specifications in geography should require students to:

- develop knowledge and understanding of selected physical, human and environmental processes that underpin key geographical concepts
- develop a knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of place, space, diversity, interdependence, people–environment interaction, the processes associated with these, and change over time
- study at a range of scales and understand the importance of scale as a geographical idea
- use a range of skills and techniques, including the use of maps and images at different scales necessary for geographical study
- carry out research, and out-of-classroom work including fieldwork, as appropriate to the topics selected
- use modern information technologies, including geographical information systems, as appropriate to the content
- develop understanding of the application and relevance of geography.

3.2 In addition for A2 the specifications should require students to:

- undertake individual research/investigative work, including fieldwork
- extend their understanding of geographical ideas, concepts and processes
- identify and analyse the connections between the different aspects of geography
- Analyse and synthesise geographical information in a variety of forms and from a range of sources

- consider new ideas and developments about the changing nature of geography in the 21st century
- critically reflect on and evaluate the potential and limitations of approaches and methods used both in and outside the classroom.

4. Key skills

4.1 AS and A level specifications in geography should provide opportunities for developing and generating evidence for assessing relevant key skills from the list below. Where appropriate these opportunities should be directly cross-referenced, at specified level(s), to the key skills standards, which may be found on the QCA website (www.qca.org.uk).

- Application of number
- Communication
- Improving own learning and performance
- Information and communication technology
- Problem solving
- Working with others

5. Assessment objectives

5.1 The assessment objectives apply to the whole specification for AS and A level, although the range of weightings allows awarding bodies to tailor the weightings to fit their own AS and A2 specifications. Specifications should include more detailed assessment objectives as appropriate to the planned assessment regime.

5.2 Knowledge, understanding and skills are closely linked. Specifications should require that candidates demonstrate the assessment objectives in the context of the content and skills prescribed.

All candidates must be required to meet the following assessment objectives. The assessment objectives for AS and A levels are to be weighted in all specifications as indicated.

Assessment objectives		Weighting
AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the content, concepts and processes.	30–55%
AO2	Analyse, interpret and evaluate geographical information, issues and viewpoints and apply understanding in unfamiliar contexts.	20–40%
AO3	Select and use a variety of methods, skills and techniques (including the use of new technologies) to investigate questions and issues, reach conclusions and communicate findings.	25–45%

6. Scheme of assessment

6.1 Assessment must be entirely through external assessment.

6.2 All AS and A level schemes of assessment must require candidates to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills in a variety of ways, including extended prose. In planning the scheme of assessment to accompany the content, awarding bodies should be guided by the criteria given below.

- The assessment approach chosen must match the aims and content of the specification.
- The specification should provide an assessment scheme summary, making clear the relationship between content and assessment and between AS and A level.

Synoptic assessment

6.3 All specifications should include synoptic assessment at A2. The synoptic element will be assessed through all the assessment objectives. The definition of synoptic assessment in the context of geography is as follows:

- synoptic assessment involves assessment of candidates' ability to draw on their understanding of the connections between different aspects of the subject represented in the specification and demonstrate their ability to 'think like a geographer'.

Examples of synoptic assessment tasks might include:

- decision-making/problem-solving/issues-evaluation exercises requiring candidates to draw together relevant knowledge, understanding and skills of the specification, to tackle a decision, problem or issue that is new to them
- an essay question covering geographical issues or problems that would require candidates to draw together and apply relevant integrated knowledge, understanding and skills of the specification
- an essay question exploring key geographical concepts through linkages between physical, human and environmental geography
- an assessment on a particular region or area, which is on a scale that allows candidates to draw together and apply relevant knowledge, understanding and skills of processes or concepts of the specification.

Quality of written communication

- 6.4 AS and A level specifications will be required to assess the candidates' quality of written communication in accordance with the guidance document produced by QCA.